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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 032264

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SUBJECT: Guangdong Villagers Clash with 1,000 Police:
Latest Example of a Troubled Area

REF: Guangzhou 29575

11. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg.
Reason 1.4 (d).

12. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Western and Hong Kong media sources reported that on November 8, villagers protesting in Shunde, Guangdong, (one hour southwest of Guangzhou) detained around 300 officials and foreign dignitaries at an opening ceremony of a new warehouse. On November 9, about 1,000 riot police used tear gas and attack dogs to clear out the protestors (no arrests or injuries reported). The Sanzhou village protest was not an isolated incident, but rather reflects simmering unrest in the village and throughout the nearby region. Incidents of this sort do not seem to be linked in any organized manner. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

13. (U) Western and Hong Kong media reported that between 5,000-10,000 residents of Sanzhou village, Lunjiao township, Shunde district, Foshan municipality blockaded the entrance to a grand-opening ceremony of a grain warehouse, leaving about 300 government officials and foreign guests (from Thailand, Germany, Britain and Hong Kong) detained inside. Residents claimed the warehouse was built on land that was taken from that at an unfair price. The villagers said that a foreign businessman paid officials RMB 135,000, USD 16,875, per mu (1 mu equals 0.16 acres) for the warehouse, but villagers only received RMB 35,000, USD 4,375, per mu, and the difference was supposedly pocketed by officials. The villagers eventually let the international guests leave, but detained officials for 18 hours, demanding that they investigate and punish corrupt village chiefs. On the morning of November 9, about 1,000 riot police arrived and dispersed the crowd using tear gas and attack dogs. So far no arrests or injuries have been reported. Shunde Foreign Affairs officers told congenoffs that they were not aware of the incident and had no comment.

Background to Sanzhou Incident

14. (U) Since the beginning of last year, Sanzhou villagers have been complaining to local officials about compensation problems. According to Hong Kong's Apple Daily, one villager said that half of Sanzhou's 9,000 acres was sold illegally by officials last year. Villagers protested the sale 10 times to the provincial government and some of villagers even traveled to Beijing to protest, however,

Sanzhou village officials were unwilling to share any information about village transactions. The villagers then began a more aggressive strategy. On June 13, a small group of protestors demonstrated against a development project on land they believed had been illegally confiscated. According to the Apple Daily, about 100 hired thugs assaulted the protestors, forcing them to leave. The protestors then incited others and about 10,000 villagers returned to the scene and detained the thugs for two days.

Foshan: A Problematic Municipality

¶5. (U) The Sanzhou incident is one of many examples of rural unrest in the Foshan area, particularly in the districts of Shunde and Nanhai. Both districts, originally rural areas, have undergone rapid industrialization, which has converted most of the farmland into commercial use. Villagers say they have gained little from the development. In October 2005, the Guangdong government announced a plan to deal with the situation. The government's new measures on "Administration of Collectively Owned Land for Construction Purposes," promised to allow farmers to conduct transactions on collectively owned non-arable land. Two years before the implementation of the new measures, Shunde and Nanhai were chosen as pilot project areas, because of their problems with land compensation.

¶6. (SBU) The measures have thus far been ineffective. In April of this year, Hong Kong press reported another protest in Nanhai's Nanzhuang township, where about 300-400 villagers blockaded an industrial park to protest the detention of five villagers. The villagers were seeking restitution for the allocation of more than 200 hectares of farmland for the construction of the Foshan National High-Tech Industries Development Zone without village approval.

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In June, seven villagers in Nanhai's Sanshan village were secretly arrested for protesting illegal land seizures in

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¶2005. On September 18, the villagers' court hearings began, sparking interest among Chinese dissident circles.

Connections Between Protests?

¶7. (C) According to the SCMP's Leu Siew Ying (protect), economics is at the center of Foshan's problems. The gains by the region's rich, land-thirsty developers have not been shared with local residents. When speaking with villagers, Leu said she heard frequent complaints about land compensation and low job prospects. (Note: Leu told poloff she was not allowed by SCMP editors to report on the recent Sanzhou protest because of difficulties with local authorities. On August 15 Leu was detained while trying to report on the anniversary of the Taishi incident and she has been searched numerous times when leaving the country, see reftel. End note). In Foshan, most young people have left the village for better-paying jobs in the city, while those who remain are forced to survive on a few hundred RMB a month.

¶8. (C) According to the Chinese Human Rights Defender's website ("Weiquan Wang"), Zhao Xin from the Empowerment and Rights Institute as well as other activists are in contact with the seven arrested villagers from Nanhai's Sanzhou village. Additionally, Shunde and Nanhai share a border with Guangzhou's Panyu district, the scene of the 2005 Taishi incident. Nevertheless, Leu does not believe there is a direct connection among these various protests in Foshan. While the villagers are aware of incidents such as Taishi, she said, "they are not uniting together in an organized manner."

